

Safety Sends #12

Lots of positive dialogue about Composite Risk Management (CRM) since SS#11. I promised some feedback; here is a white paper for your thoughts and consideration. Please send your comments directly to me. I have requested CRM to be included in the FM 100-14 due out 3rd Qtr.

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Composite Risk Management

We are an Army at war that is also transforming. Amid these significant activities we are challenged to preserve and protect our combat power. Using traditional risk management methods, we have made some progress toward this goal, yet much improvement remains. We need a breakthrough approach that will maximize our combat readiness.

More effective risk management requires a cultural change. We must move beyond compartmentalized thinking that stresses the “big operation” and main movements. We must recognize that tactical or accidental, in the center or on the perimeter, bad results are the same: Dead is dead, and every loss decreases combat power. This is the notion of **composite risk management**, and it is at the heart of a cultural change.

Composite risk blends tactical, threat-based risks with accidental, hazard-based risks to create a more thorough evaluation of danger, thus enabling highly effective risk mitigation. Summarized succinctly from the standpoint of the Soldier, composite risk asks, “What’s going to kill me and my buddies?” This simple, results-oriented view depicts a transformed mindset that realizes the enemy and tactical operations are not the sole concern, but there is also potential for fatal mishaps due to the environment, systems issues, and human error. Composite risk management, then, combines such sources into a holistic assessment of exposure (Figure 1).

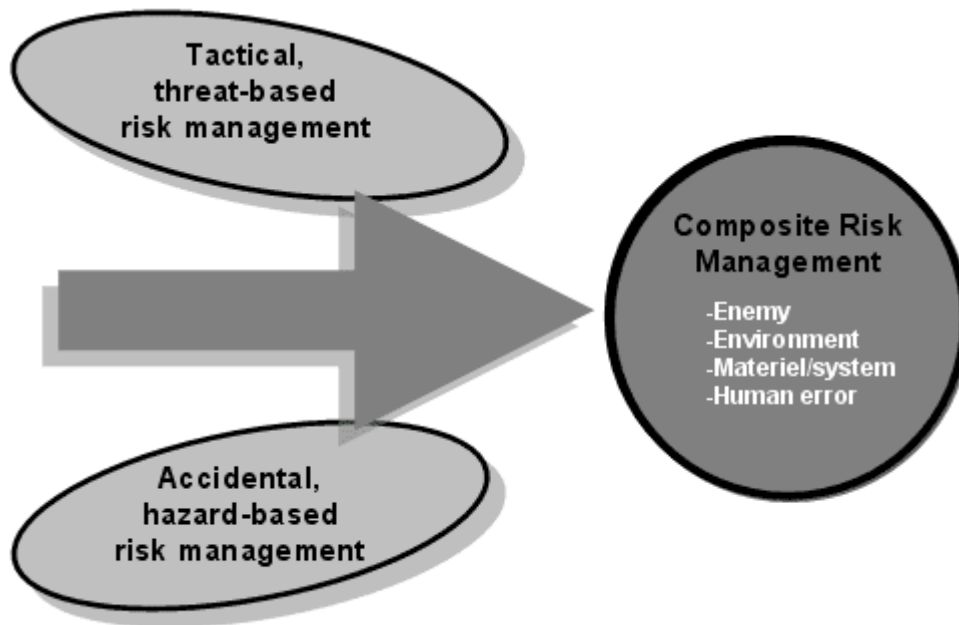


Figure 1. Composite Risk Management

How important is it to view tactical and accidental risks together? Consider that for FY03 and FY04, the Army suffered 1,155 fatalities, with 46% (530) due to accidents. Historically, the data are even worse: During all conflicts since the Spanish-American War, about 55% of Army deaths were due to accidents. Hence, losses from mishaps have degraded combat power on par with losses from enemy action. Statistically, we clearly see the whole problem and can acknowledge the need for composite risk management. Yet many Soldiers still suffer from tunnel vision, focusing on one source of risk and discounting others. The recent true story below illustrates the point.

Company-level leaders were planning a convoy operation in Iraq. Their primary decision revolved around which route to take, and their main data gathering consisted of color-coded route alternatives that assessed the enemy threats. With a quick analysis, they chose a “green” route for the mission—that is, one with no enemy threat. Having mitigated the tactical, threat-based risk they gave only cursory planning to the hazard-based risks that also were embedded in the mission:

- The green route’s distance vs. distances for unchosen routes
- Road width, bridges and bridge width, climbs and descents
- Road condition, type of shoulder, drop-offs or embankments
- Sharp curves, intersections, limited sight areas, surrounding terrain
- Traffic, speed, following distances
- Fatigue and rest stops, checkpoints, communications
- Number of vehicles, types of vehicles, loading, handling characteristics

- Drivers' skill levels, crew pairing
- PPE (vests, helmets, seatbelts)
- Emergency procedures and breakdowns

To be sure, no one wants to be killed by the enemy. However, it is noteworthy that each of the factors above was also responsible for FY04 fatalities in theater, but these hazards did not seem to faze the junior leaders. The mission, the enemy . . . HOOAH! Let's saddle up and charge! This is a narrow and often fatal view.

Composite risk management supplements the focus on the main operation with consideration of other hazards to give a complete picture of exposure. There is no separation of tactical or accidental, deployed or garrison, on duty or off duty—it is risk management 24/7, because Soldiers are vital Army assets whether engaging the enemy, recocking back home, or on block leave. This holistic view says, “Based off everything we know, what hazards will we face and how can we mitigate the risk?” (See Figure 2.) The enemy, materiel, the environment, and human factors—during a mission or outside of it—interact to pose composite risk to the Soldier.

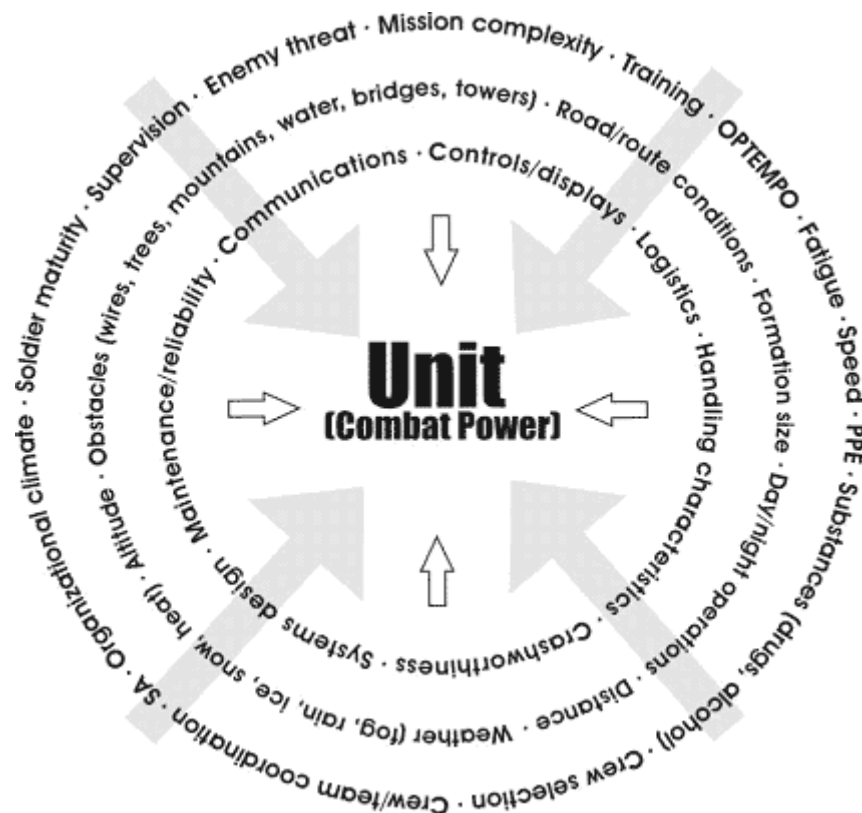


Figure 2. Composite Risk

Composite risk management does not paralyze through fear of all that can go wrong; it does not foster risk aversion. Rather, by mitigating the known hazards to acceptable levels, the approach emboldens Soldiers to act confidently. Composite risk management does not guarantee no harm will come, but it lessens the probability significantly. Such knowledge bolsters courage and increases unit effectiveness.

And what of safety? Up to this point no mention has been made of the term, on purpose. As part of the cultural change, the concept of composite risk management includes safety but supersedes the term and transcends the practice. In many circles, safety is seen as a hindrance to mission accomplishment, a litany of “can’ts” and caveats. Others, particularly young Soldiers, scoff at the term “safety” because it does not relate well to why they joined the Army. Safety has become a four-letter word and is shackled by a negative connotation. On the other hand, composite risk management deals with preserving combat readiness and protecting combat power. The approach says that we value our people, so we control risk wherever and whenever it exists to keep our Soldiers in the fight. We teach our Soldiers what they CAN do to stay ready, willing, and able. Composite risk management, therefore, is more comprehensive and positive.

Of course, the notion of composite risk management is much easier to grasp than it is to execute. Indeed, the real cultural change occurs not by espousing the new idea but in practicing it. To that end, we must overcome several obstacles if we are to successfully transition to this new approach. As alluded to above, there is currently a general bias toward tactical, threat-based risk management. This stems in part from the natural tendency to be more concerned over things that are deemed to be largely out of one’s control (like the enemy) as compared to things supposedly in one’s control (like driving, piloting, or cleaning a weapon). Part of the cultural change, then, means conveying that human error is real, it is powerful, and no one is immune. Your own mistakes or those of others can be deadly . . . Soldiers must know it, believe it, and *feel* it.

Related to the tactical bias is the tendency to focus on the big operation and limit risk management to the main effort. Traditionally left unattended are activities in the periphery, to include mundane missions, transiting between locations, and off-duty activity. The latter is especially elusive to supervisors, because the prevailing opinion of leaders toward Soldiers is, “What you do on your own time isn’t my concern. Besides, I can’t control your off-duty behavior, nor do I have the authority to do so even if I wanted to.” This hands-off attitude by leaders has proved to be deadly, as the majority of fatalities away from theater have occurred in off-duty situations. In contrast, the transformed leader thinks, “My Soldiers are assets for combat power 24/7. If I lose one Soldier on duty or off duty, the result is the same—the unit suffers. It’s my responsibility to know my Soldiers and manage risk.” This type of leader knows who drives what, who is mature and

who is undisciplined, who is experienced and who is a novice, personalities, hobbies, hot buttons, and more. He then uses such knowledge to mitigate accidental risks (especially those off duty) as solidly as he manages tactical risks. This is not intrusive, but involved; it is not big brother, but band of brothers.

Sadly, we know leaders traditionally have left many accidental hazards unchecked, and the results have been tragic. Of those 1,155 Soldiers lost to accidents over the last 2 years, *nearly half were preventable*. Before us lies the challenge to develop fully engaged leaders who understand that it is a basic responsibility to their Soldiers, unit, and Army to preserve combat readiness and protect combat power by managing composite risk. Before us also is the need to develop an understanding in Soldiers that their life matters to others, and the enemy is not the only threat to it. Such is the stuff of cultural change.

Composite risk management holds great promise for dramatically reducing our losses, because the approach brings accidental hazards to the forefront and compels leaders to deal with them as seriously as they do tactical issues. It is a results-oriented approach that values our troops around the clock, around the world.

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